DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 888 PS 011 712

AUTHOR Moran, James D. III; O'Brien, Gayle
TITLE The Development of Intention-Based Moral Judgments in Three- and Four-Year-Old Children.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 10p.; An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Southwestern Society for Research in Human Development (Lawrence, KS, March 27-29, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; Cognitive Development; *Moral Development; *Preschool Children
IDENTIFIERS *Intention; *Moral Judgment Task (Piaget)

ABSTRACT

The developmental sequence of preschool children's moral judgments, and their emphasis on intentions versus property damage was investigated. Eight moral judgment stories with drawings were read to twelve 3 1/2- and twelve 4 1/2-year-old children (mean ages = 46.6 and 54.0 months, respectively). The stories included either positive or negative consequences for damage directed against either a person or property. In the positive Intention/negative consequence stories, age groups predominantly judged on the basis of consequence in all contexts. In the negative intention/positive consequence stories, however, 4 1/2-year-olds made consequence-based judgments only in stories of property damage [p=.IT.01], whereas 3 1/2-year-olds did not make consequence-based judgments in either context. The findings suggest that 3 1/2-year-olds respond to any negative event [either intention or consequence] in the story and that 4 1/2-year-olds conform to traditional Piagetian theory only when property damage is involved (Author/SS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED192888

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The Development of Intention-Based Moral Judgments in Three- and Four-Year-Old Children

James D. Moran III
Gayle O'Brien

School of Home Economics
University of Oklahoma

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the meeting of the Southwestern Society for Research in Human Development, Lawrence, Kansas, March, 1980. Inquiries should be sent to first author at: Department of Management, Housing and Family Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Running head: Moral Reasoning in Three- and Four-Year-Olds

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
James D. Moran
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS011712

Abstract

Recent studies have shown that in some contexts, preschool children appear to base moral judgments on intentions yet little effort has been made to investigate the developmental sequence of these judgments. Eight moral judgment stories were read to twelve 3½- and twelve 4½-year-old children (mean ages = 46.6 and 54.0 months, respectively). The stories included either positive or negative intentions with either positive or negative consequences with damage directed against either a person or property. In the positive intention/negative consequence stories, age groups predominantly judged on the basis of consequence in all contexts. In the negative intention/positive consequence stories, however, 4½-year-olds made consequence-based judgments only in stories of property damage, $p < .01$, whereas 3½-year-olds did not make consequence-based judgments in either context. The finding suggest that 3½-year-olds respond to any negative event (either intention or consequence) in the story and 4½-year-olds may conform to traditional Piagetian theory only when property damage is involved.

The Development of Intention-Based Moral Judgments in Three- and Four-Year-Old Children

In the traditional Piagetian conception of moral judgment, young children (under the age of about 7 or 8 years of age) do not judge the actions of others on the basis of intention but rather focus on the consequences of the action (Piaget, 1932). Thus, a child who breaks 15 dishes while trying to help mother set the table is seen as deserving more punishment than the child who breaks only one dish while running about the house creating havoc. In this model young children are expected to judge on consequences, and older children on intention. The traditional theoretical approaches, unfortunately, appear to neglect early childhood in their discussion of the development of moral reasoning. Little research has been conducted on four-year-olds and even less has been done with 3-year-olds. Yet at this age observational data suggest individual differences among four-year-olds when responding to behavior related to moral judgment. For example, some children show a great deal of empathy; or some show a large amount of sharing and cooperation; and of course, some children do not display these behaviors.

Studies concerned with the replication of Piaget's findings have tended to focus on intentionality. These studies center on the child's perception of intention in interpersonal interaction. Several different investigations have shown that when the degree of property damage is held constant, children as young as five can use intention as a basis

for their moral judgments (Chandler, Greenspan, Barenboim, 1973; Gutkin 1972). Elkind and Dabek (1977) working with kindergarteners and fourth-graders suggest that children judge on intention earlier in stories of person damage than they do in situations of property damage.

There has been little attempt, however, to provide a systematic framework for these "exceptions to the rule" in the conception of young children's moral reasoning. The progression of moral judgments in the preschool years has not been adequately demonstrated. This study investigates the moral reasoning of preschool children at ages 3½ and 4½ years of age. Mostly consequence-based judgments are expected at the earlier age level, whereas at 4½ years intention-based judgments, especially in situations involving damage to another person, may begin to appear.

Method

Sample. The sample consisted of 12 children in a preschool program for 3-year-olds (mean age = 46.6 months) and 12 children attending a preschool program for 4-year-olds (mean age = 54.0 months). Both groups of children attended university administered programs in a predominantly middle-class community. The younger group consisted of 7 boys and 5 girls, whereas there were 6 boys and 6 girls among the 4-year-olds.

Instruments. Eight moral judgment stories were involved in the study. Each story was accompanied by a two-frame cartoon-like drawing depicting the action and the order of presentation for the stories was

determined randomly. Four of the stories had a positive intention and negative consequence and four stories were written with a negative intention and positive consequence. The context of these stories incorporated either property damage or injury to another person.

Children rated the main story actor on an 8-point scale ranging from very bad (a rating of 1) to very good (a rating of 8). The scale was comprised of a two-dimensional bar-graph representation of degrees of "goodness" or "badness" to assist the children in its use.

Procedure. Each child participated individually in the research session conducted by a female experimenter for approximately 20 minutes. The child was introduced to the rating scale prior to presentation of the first moral judgment story. Only after it appeared to the researcher that the child comprehended use of the scale were the stories presented. Each story was read twice to the child. Following the second reading, the child was asked whether he or she thought the story actor was good or bad. After this response, the researcher asked the child to explain the reasons for this judgment. If the child needed to hear the story again, the experimenter read the story again. Finally, the experimenter asked the child to rate the character on the rating scale, using only the part of the scale (the "good" side or the "bad" side) which corresponded to the child's previous response.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of variance with repeated measures revealed an interaction between age and type of story F (1, 22) = 4.36, $p < .05$. There were

no significant gender differences in any of the analyses. There were no significant differences between the age groups in the positive intention/negative consequence stories. In this setting, both 3- and 4-year-olds predominantly judged the characters on the basis of consequences, confirming traditional Piagetian theory (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

In the negative intention/positive consequence stories, however, the response of the children did not conform to traditional theory. Individual comparisons via Tukey tests revealed that 4½-year-olds do not rate the two story contexts (damage to property and damage to person) similarly, q (66) = 5.08, $p < .01$. Similar to the findings of Elkind and Dabek (1977) with kindergarten-age children, these 4½-year-olds made more consequence-based judgments with stories involving property damage and more intention-based judgments in situations involving intended damage to persons (see Table 1). Tukey tests using pooled error terms also showed a significant age difference in the negative intention/positive consequence stories with damage to property, q (22) = 4.31, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). This story set produced more negative ratings by the 3½-year-olds than in the 4½-year-olds. Although it appears that the 3½-year-olds are making judgments based on intention, a more viable hypothesis suggests that these children are focusing on negativity within the story. That is, these 3½-year-olds are centering on the most salient aspect of the situation which, to them, is any negativity either in the intention or the consequence.

This latter finding has implications for the model proposed by Elkind and Dabek which suggests that intention-based judgments develop in situations of person damage prior to contexts involving property damage because the developmental sequence of this trend has been brought into question. The data taken as a whole suggest that the unidimensional framework of Piaget in describing the consequence-to-intention transition may be too simplistic. Contrary to expectations 3½-year-olds did not make all consequence-based judgments but appear to center on any negative aspects of the story and rate the story character as "bad" if either intention or consequence is negative. By 4½-years, children are at least beginning to discriminate among story contexts and make judgments accordingly. Additional data is still required for the formulation of an adequate developmental sequencing of moral reasoning in children younger than 7 years of age. Nevertheless, the findings of this study demonstrated that among these children age and story context variables are critical features to consider in future studies of the development of moral reasoning.

References

Chandler, M. J., Greenspan, S., & Barenboim, C. Judgments of intentionality in response to videotaped and verbally presented dilemmas. The Medium is the message. Child Development, 1973, 44, 315-320.

Elkind, D. & Dabek, R. F. Personal injury and property damage in the moral judgments of children. Child Development, 1977, 48, 518-522.

Gutkin, D. The effects of systematic story changes intentionality in children's moral judgments. Child Development, 1972, 43, 187-195.

Piaget, J. The moral judgment of the child. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932.

Table 1

Mean Story Character Ratings Moral Judgment Stories

Age	Type of Damage: Person	Type of Damage: Property
Positive Intention/Negative Consequence Stories		
3-year-olds	2.33	2.88
4-year-olds	2.70	2.74
Negative Intention/Positive Consequence Stories		
3-year-olds	2.29	2.46
4-year-olds	2.90	4.55